

Message Text

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11

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NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0179

NOFORN

CINCUSNAVEUR ALSO FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINR, ET

SUBJECT: ERITREAN DEVELOPMENTS

1. FOLLOWING REPORT BASED ON 9 FEB CONVERSATION BETWEEN

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CONS OFF AND USUALLY RELIABLE SOURCE. SOURCE STATES HE HAS RECENTLY TALKED WITH ERITREAN FORMER MEMBER OF PMAC WHO HAS DEFECTED TO ELF AND THAT HE HIMSELF SPENT THE WEEKEND OF 1 FEB IN AN ELF CAMP 40 KMS SOUTH OF ASMARA.

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A. ARMY: SOURCE REPORTS THAT ETH ARMY IN ERITREA HAD SUFFICIENT AMMO FOR 600 MEN FOR ONE MONTH, WHICH IS INADEQUATE UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. THE ARMY ASKED FOR AMMO FROM POLICE WHO REFUSED REQUEST.

B. ELF STRENGTH: SOURCE REPORTS THAT ELF HAVE 1000 ARMED MEN AND PLF 2000 WITHIN 25 KMS. HE BELIEVES THAT NOT MORE THAN 40 PLF INITIATED MILITARY ACTION OF 31 JAN. HE SAYS PLF NEVER COMMIT MORE THAN 200 MEN TO A BATTLE, AND THAT THEIR CASUALTIES LAST WEEK INCLUDE 20 PLF AND 6 ELF DEAD, IN ADDITION TO WOUNDED. HE REPORTS THAT IN ADI NEFES (15 KMS NORTH OF ASMARA) 600 SOLDIERS WERE CAPTURED AND THAT THE PARATROOPERS HAVE REFUSED TO GO TO THE FIELD AFTER AN INITIAL DEFEAT. SOURCE ALSO REPORTS 5 PLANES AND 2 HELICOPTERS HAVE BEEN SHOT DOWN. ACCORDING TO SOURCE MOST OF LAST WEEK'S FIGHTING WAS DONE BY PLF AND THAT ELF IS GATHERING FORCE SOUTH OF ASMARA. HE REPORTS THAT 2000 FORMER HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS HAVE FINISHED A 6 MONTH

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GUERRILLA TRAINING COURSE, AND THAT OTHERS ARE NOW BEING TRAINED. SOURCE ALSO SAYS ELF HAVE MEN AT KEY POINTS IN CENTRAL ETHIOPIA. THIS WAS MENTIONED IN CONNECTION WITH ATTACK ON BRIDGE ON ASSAB-ADDIS ROAD.

C. POLICE: SOURCE REPORTS THAT COMMANDO POLICE WANTED TO JOIN THE ELF, BUT ELF ORDERED THEM BACK TO PROTECT ASMARA POPULACE AGAINST ARMY. COL HABTEMARIAM, ACTING ERITREAN POLICE COMMISSIONER HAD ORDERED COMMANDO POLICE TO POSITIONS AWAY FROM ASMARA, AND NOW HE IS BLAMED FOR DEATH OF ASMARA CIVILIANS. CP HAVE RETURNED FROM OUTPOSTSN ARE NOW PATROLLING ASMARA, AND REFUSING ORDERS FROM COL. HABTEMARIAM.

D. CIVILIAN DEATHS: SOURCE REPORTS 128 DEAD IN ASMARA AND 100 IN WORKIDUBA, WHICH IS NEAR ASMARA. HE ADDS THAT PEOPLE ARE NOT MOURNING BUT ONLY WANT REVENGE.

E. FUEL SUPPLIES: SOURCE REPORTS THAT ELF ORDERED CIVILIANS TO FILL PRIVATE CARS IN ORDER TO TAKE GAS FROM ARMY. HE ADDS THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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NINETY PERCENT OF TANKER DRIVERS ARE ERITREAN AND NOT LIKELY TO REFUEL ASMARA WITHOUT ELF PERMISSION. SOURCE INDICATES ELF INTENDS TO CUT OFF FUEL SUPPLIES TO ASMARA AS A TACTIC OF WAR.

F. ATTITUDE TOWARDS AMERICANS: HE REPORTS THAT ELF ARE CHANGING

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NEUTRAL POSTURE TOWARDS U.S. AND TAKING MORE AGGRESSIVE ACTION. HE ASKED ABOUT MILITARY AID AND CONS OFF EXPLAINED MILITARY AID PROGRAM. COMMENT: SEVERAL ERITREANS OVER LAST FEW DAYS HAVE RAISED QUESTION USG SUPPLY OF WEAPONS AND AMMO TO ETHIOPIA IN CONTEXT OF PRESENT FIGHTING.

G. CEASEFIRE: SOURCE REPORTS THAT PMAC HAD ORDERED COMMITTEE OF 38 TO ARRANGE A CEASEFIRE WITH THE ELF, BUT THAT COMMITTEE MEMBERS HAVE BALKEK AT THE REQUEST. COMMENT: IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE PMAC HAS BEEN HUMBLED BY ITS LOSSES IN THE FIELD, AND ITS LOGISTIC PROBLEMS. THE PMAC EFFORT AT A CEASEFIRE COULD BE THE RESULT OF A MORE REALISTIC ASSESSMENT OF ITS STRENGTH RELATIVE TO THE ELF OR MERELY A DELAYING TACTIC IN ITS WAR AGAINST ERITREA.

2. COMMENT: THE SOURCE'S FIGURES ON LAST WEEK'S CASUALTIES MAY BE A BIT OFF. HOWEVER, LAST WEEK'S FIGHTING SHOWED THAT THE HIGHLY MOTIVATED SMALL UNITS OF THE ELF, WERE MORE THAN A MATCH FOR THE DEMORALIZED, POORLY ORGANIZED ETH ARMY.

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